

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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THE SERVICE OF GOD (i)

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A.J.E.W. The last two verses read are very often in our minds, but it seemed opportune to enquire a little more deeply about what is involved in "to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus". It may lead to a greater impression of the holy and glorious matter of the service of God as it is in the assembly. What the verse has in mind is fuller and deeper than just the utterances that may enter into the service, precious as those are. There is peculiar preciousness and, we might say, glory in men brought into the place of love's nearness which is the divine thought for us, addressing God in worship. But "to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus" seems to involve the whole character and quality of the vessel of service itself. We may rightly look to the types, particularly those parts which deal in a direct way with God being served, to give us instruction as to what this service involves. We should guard, as we enquire, the uniqueness of the passage, the doxology, in Ephesians 3, because that represents the full or ultimate idea in mind. What is to be seen earlier is just a pointer in typical terms to what is for God in this greatest setting of all, and yet the Spirit has given us in those typical scriptures a great extent of detail which He can use to promote the exercise and the feelings which belong to the service. The great day of atonement, which is the subject of Leviticus 16, has a certain central place in what was established in the tabernacle, particularly as bringing out the sacrificial side, looking on to the work of Christ and the basis laid in suffering love for everything to be brought into entire suitability to God, that He should have the spot where He should dwell, that He should find His satisfaction in the order of things set up so specifically under His direction.

When we come to Solomon we have the house, a house of great wealth. Much entered into its provisions, the whole course of things under David, especially as to the service of song, the cumulation in the house of so much that enters into the deep and

productive exercise of David and the bringing in of the skilled builder, constructing a house after the pattern that was given to David with all its adornments. All this would, I think, afford us instruction as to the great culminating point of the service of praise which would be in mind now in the assembly.

E.C.B. Is the distinction between the types and what subsists in the Spirit's day seen in that in regard both to the tabernacle and the temple the glory of Jehovah filled the house, but in the Spirit's day and in Ephesians it is glory to God. It is not a question of God Himself filling the scene with His glory but there being glory to Him in a scene which is the fruit of His own operations.

A.J.E.W. I think it is important to see that; it was that that made me remark that we should keep the Ephesians scripture on its unique level. By doing that we keep the service of God in the assembly on the level which is divinely intended for it, because nothing that has preceded touches the glory of what is for God, as you are suggesting, in the assembly, the great vessel of responsive service. Yet the care the Spirit of God takes in setting out matters relating in a general sense to the presence of God and His service affords instruction for us.

E.C.B. The whole order of things that relates directly to what is earthly (leaving aside what it is as types) is related to God's glory coming into the scene. Ultimately the glory of Jehovah will cover the earth; but in the assembly there is glory to God, which is not excluded from the other area of things but is the characteristic now, that there is glory to God.

A.J.E.W. That just brings into focus what is one's concern in suggesting this, that the peculiar preciousness of that should be understood and entered into by us. I wonder if we sufficiently conceive and appreciate and answer to the greatness of the assembly's place in this connection, whether we need to seize it with, if I could use the word, greater enthusiasm, that the energy of life and power in the Spirit might come in to bring the enrichment we so desire in this service Godward; an extension of it, not perhaps in

point of time, but in point of wealth, as we engage in it following the Lord's supper. The fact that the service follows the Lord's supper is itself a mark of something which is entirely distinctive according to God in this time of the Spirit.

D.J.H. What bearing has the reference, "the assembly in Christ Jesus", on what you are saying?

A.J.E.W. I suppose it brings in much that relates to purpose, but purpose established in that Person, and brings the present force of the matter to bear upon us. Things that are in Christ Jesus run back into purpose but are brought into expression and operation immediately, the basis being the place that Christ has up there and the efficacy of everything that He gloriously has effected.

D.J.H. I wondered whether there was any connection between Christ up there and the cloud of fragrant incense that is brought in in Leviticus. It is even brought in before the blood is mentioned.

A.J.E.W. I thought the fragrance that you speak of was of peculiar import, referring to the fragrance of Christ in the midst of suffering, the fire brought to bear upon the incense: "put the incense upon the fire before Jehovah, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy-seat". What an affecting presentation of the fragrance of Christ as He bore what the fire speaks of! The preciousness of that is to be in our minds, the entire devotion of that glorious Person going into death to establish the ground of everything being secured, free of every kind of defilement, brought into the presence of God in purity, cleansed from every possible hindering thing. The need of this exists as we speak about, and enter into, the service of praise, the work of Christ as the only basis on which God secures everything in circumstances and conditions that answer to Himself and His own pleasure.

D.J.H. And is the fragrance brought in first because the Person is greater than the work that He has effected, great as that is?

A.J.E.W. Quite so. Everything is purified, and there is a special suggestion as to Aaron and his house where the largest offering is brought in: "the bullock of the sin-offering which is for himself, and

shall make atonement for himself and for his house". It is the saints as constituting the priestly family that are in mind. They have a singular place on the great day of atonement, as if God would bring out the heavenly side, the priestly side, based on what is of heaven at this point as having its distinctive place in His mind and heart.

F.C.M. Would such an expression as "both his hands full of fragrant incense beaten small" relate to divine pleasure in men who are in priestly competence and absorbed with Christ in His service?

A.J.E.W. That is very much in mind, because we need to have some grasp of the delightfulness to God of seeing the saints secured after His thought and available for what is precious to Himself. We do well to reflect on the cost of this in suffering, to allow that to work on our affections, the cost of it to Christ and to God in the working out of matters in the holy sufferings of Jesus. The whole matter there affords a basis for God to secure things according to His own thought, with no element of weakness or deficiency, especially no element of defilement, nothing that would dishonour Him in His presence. The whole scene is in character secured for God. We know that we are dealing with types, therefore the matter is renewed each year; Hebrews instructs us that the position in Christianity is embraced in the one sacrifice, the "one sacrifice for sins" (Heb 10: 12), and yet we see the skill of the Spirit in giving us such instruction as this in relation to the great centre of God's service as it was in Israel.

R.E.T. You referred in your prayer to the thought of change. Would what you have just said, getting a sense of the cost, and then the experience every Lord's day morning, help us to take on a change?

A.J.E.W. I believe it would, because what is set out in Leviticus 16 is the total disallowance of man in flesh. It is well to speak of these things because they underlie the whole state of things in which the service is proceeding. There is no room for man in flesh in what is brought forward in Leviticus 16, it is put right away. That is essential to what we are saying if God is to secure His satisfaction. He has made provision for that at such cost.

R.E.T. You feel you want to get an experience like this every Lord's day, not only to be able to enjoy the Supper, but also the help which comes out of the Supper for the rest of the week.

A.J.E.W. It is just that concern that is current in my mind. We can rejoice in and thank God for the wealth of experience we do have, but devoted hearts would cherish more for God Himself and seek the conditions in which more for Himself can be freely furnished; these follow, I believe, on the basis of what is set out in the figure in Leviticus 16, the great day of atonement.

C R.B. Do you connect Leviticus 16 with the Lord's words at the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", Matt. 27 :46? Do we need to get deepening impressions of the awfulness of sin in the sight of God, that such a work was needed? Would that liberate us to speak to God as our God in the light of the revelation of God in the three Persons?

A.J.E.W. Hence the need of getting back the cross in the sense of seeing what was effected there and the occasion of it in what sin is in God's sight. I feel challenged whether our feelings as to that are being deepened. As we contemplate the suffering side, whether it be in the scriptures themselves that touch the cross, or in such typical scriptures as these, how feelingly and yet tenderly the suffering side is brought before us to affect us!

J.M. Is that given point to in the further reference in that Psalm 22: "And thou art holy, thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel" (v 3)?

A.J.E.W. Which would free us from any kind of carelessness as to what enters into this service. It is not that one wants to dwell on what is negative - far be the thought, because the very sacrifice we are speaking of has established everything positively and suitably for the pleasure of God - but we need to be free of anything that is casual or careless in respect of this service and understand how we can rightly come into it. God has made provision that we may rightly come into it and be sustained in it for Himself and for His satisfaction. The

sense of "thou art holy" is to be upon our spirits as we ponder the greatness of serving God.

C.C.I. Would this link on with Christ's sanctifying service? Hebrews 2 speaks of Him as the Sanctifier and the sanctified being all of one, "for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (v 11), which is a quotation, I presume, from Psalm 22. I was wondering whether going into the holiest and the holiness of God, and Christ making us fit to be in His presence according to His holy nature, in love, are great matters in the forsaking and the atoning sufferings.

A.J.E.W. All that has been gloriously effected, the basis of sanctification is finalised. We need to come into the gain of it, and we find wonderful help in the Spirit in that; but to see the positive side of accomplished sacrifice, and everything effected in Christ, is a wonderful thing to the soul.

J.C.E. Is it a point of importance that the cry came at the end of the three hours and not at the beginning? It is the nearest point to the rending of the veil. One might have expected it to come at the beginning. As Mr Mitchell quoted, the further part of that scripture is as to the praises and the thought of persons entering in.

A.J.E.W. I think that helps us, the rending of the veil meaning, I suppose, in the fulness of it, that God has come out and that Man has gone in.

E.P. It is very fragrant - and we catch the fragrance - when it says in Ephesians 1 "in whom we have redemption through his blood" (v 7). It is "in whom"; the antecedent is "the Beloved".

A.J.E.W. It is of great interest that that should be so affectingly presented in the Ephesian letter, that that which leads up to the remarkable doxology we read touches the ground laid in the shedding of His precious blood, the sacrifice of Christ.

S.D.K.R. What Mr Palmer has just said is immediately followed by "having made known to us the mystery of his will". Is that all bearing on the service that we should be intelligent as to God's thoughts in the matter?

A.J.E.W. And it is a question of what has been made known. It is a mark of the delight that God has to disclose Himself and His thoughts, that what may be for Himself, the uniqueness of what the assembly is toward God and for Him, might come out. God has come out from His side in the most blessed and remarkable way, the way in which He is toward us in the unfolding of what is precious to Himself, and in the unfolding of glory that relates to God Himself. How immense this is! The Ephesian letter gives us some impression of that, but it is all to affect us in greater depth in what is going back to God in assembly service.

E.C.B. Do the Lord's words in regard to the cup at the inauguration of the Supper in the gospels help us in this? They are "my blood ... that shed for many for remission of sins", Matt. 26: 28; "that shed for many ", Mark 14: 24; and "which is poured out for you", Luke 22: 20. Do all those references have a bearing on what you are saying and some connection with Leviticus 16? The bearing is in relation to sins rather than sin (although the point as to sin is there), whereas in 1 Corinthians 11 from the glory that side of things is not touched on. I wondered whether it did not help us to get what was in the Lord's mind as inaugurating the Supper. We have the gain of what He gave from the glory in relation to it, but what was in His mind in the cup in the inauguration bore on what was for us and the clearing of the ground in us.

A.J.E.W. Therefore there is a difference between what may be in our minds and hearts in our approach to things and what may find expression as we engage in the service itself. We are not going back to speaking of the sufferings of the cross in an extensive way at the Supper itself; but what is presented in these scriptures, it seems to me, affords a basis for the service to go forward in greater power as we appreciate how God has established everything in such wise that His service proceeds in the wealth that He affectingly would bring into it. I think what you say as to the blood in the Lord's inauguration of the Supper is very helpful.

C.C.I. Man never ceases to be a moral being. I am thinking of God dwelling with men; not with angels, but men who have had to go

through the moral question with God and are now set up in perfect suitability to His holy nature. He is going to dwell with such a being as man.

A.J.E.W. What is set out in Leviticus 16 would point us to great thoroughness in that connection. Every part of the system comes under the purifying effect of what proceeds, as if to remind us of the need of thoroughness in the pursuing of the moral course of things you speak of, that we are not shallow but are going through the moral exercises with God and reaching an issue from them which finds its expression in what is for His pleasure.

C.C.I. So God never alters as to man's responsibility; that continues.

J.M. Is that part of the glory to God in the assembly? In the understanding and working out of what is in Leviticus 16 there is moral substance wrought in the personnel of the assembly ; and does that work out in the substantial side of glory to God in the assembly? The moral side must be there.

A.J.E.W. I am glad you have set it out in that sense, because such a vessel as this is in view, "the assembly in Christ Jesus". What enters into the preciousness and the forming of a vessel which is so uniquely marked off by God for His satisfaction! What enters into the securing of such a vessel as we see in the city in another presentation! There is a great deal by way of right and necessary moral exercise pursued in the blessed light of the fact, as this chapter shows us, that God has effected everything by way of sacrifice in the Person of Christ. In the pursuit of the moral course that you speak of we are never without resource and never without the basis of a full answer to God Himself established in what Christ has done. The sense of that should be with us as we touch these things; the great day of atonement especially seems to call attention to that in a very full way.

W.T.A. Would you say that the basis of glory to God in the assembly involves the activities of the God who has been rich in mercy?

A.J.E.W. It does indeed. It involves all that enters into the history, which may bring us to Solomon with the wonderful cumulation of

what is seen earlier in David now carried through into the house. As Mr Burr said at the beginning, it is a question here of what came down from the heavens and what came into a situation established on earth. But the choice expression of Solomon: "Arise, Jehovah Elohim, into thy resting-place, thou and the ark of thy strength: let thy priests, Jehovah Elohim, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in thy goodness". This was the choice conclusion of such a lot in the history of things in Israel, going right back to David who actually conceived the thought of the house - it was in a certain sense his proposal. It brings up the question of the remarkable efficacy of prophetic service as touching David and his course, all carried forward now in Solomon as he completes the house and, in a way, calls upon God to come into it - "Arise, Jehovah Elohim, into thy resting-place, thou and the ark of thy strength". The ark is there, Christ is in view, the glorious Person in whom God secures everything for His satisfaction in a universe of glory.

H.A.H. Is the accumulation of history summed up in what Stephen says? He refers to the tabernacle of witness and Moses and David; then "Solomon built him a house", Acts 7: 47. I wonder whether he skilfully sums up the whole history which culminated in this feature of glory in relation to Israel's history, and whether what he sees in that glorious Man in heaven extends to the full scope of Paul's ministry and things being secured in the Man Christ Jesus.

A.J.E.W. I think that helps, because it is good to realise what enters into the present time, and the unfailing faithfulness of God, which has preceded what is established now. I think we need to get our sights lifted to the level on which God has been moving, even down this time of remarkable reviving over the past hundred and fifty years. Think of the immensity of what is in mind. The test is now whether we can carry forward in spiritual power what has been effected, not only by way of basis, but reached because the building has gone on under the hand of Christ and something is emerging which has a substantial character into which God can come and intimate, so to speak, that this is where He establishes His pleasure.

C.R.B. How do you understand "the ark of thy strength"?

A.J.E.W. It is a remarkable touch as to the way that power has operated in Christ, especially in meeting the whole power of death and establishing what lies beyond.

C.R.B. Would you extend that into the reference to power at the end of Ephesians 3? The power working in us would involve the Spirit, and yet it is in relation to Christ as "the ark of thy strength".

A.J.E.W. It is a question, therefore, as so often, of the depth of consciousness that we have as to the Spirit, especially as we move into this precious service. The power is to be known in its real present working - "the power which works in us".

C.R.B. And does that enter into our worship of God, that we are brought to know the power of God Him self in this way?

A.J.E.W. Quite so. So that the whole matter is of Him - the power is of Him, the power in which the glory of this service is carried through is from God Himself, it is here in the Spirit. You marvel at the depth and measure of provision that God has made that this service should take on its full character.

D.J.H. Is that not seen in Psalm 132 where this is referred to: "Arise, Jehovah, into thy rest" (v 8)? Then when He comes into it: "This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell" (v 14) and then "I will clothe her priests" (v 16) and so on. It is what God is doing all the time, which would connect with this strength.

A.J.E.W. A singular intimation of His approval. Of course we should bear in mind what was touched on at the beginning, that is the difference between what is going up to God in glory and what is established in the glory coming in down here. But there is in the glory coming in a certain intimation of divine approval which marks off the situation for us in its own distinctness.

E.C.B. Would you see any connection between "Thou and the ark of thy strength" and "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent", John 17: 3? The ark refers to Christ as Man effecting everything for God. I wondered whether the Lord does not lead us to that point in some sense of finality in John 17: "that they should

know thee, the only true God", that is "Thou", "and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent", "the ark of thy strength".

A.J.E.W. Quite so.

E.C.B. "I have completed the work which thou gavest me that I should do it".

A.J.E.W. So you get what is final in view there, and we are challenged as to the power we have to reach that and to sustain it. God would have us to reach it and to sustain it, to touch some sense of final conditions, some sense of what is eternal and peculiarly answering to the whole scope of His satisfaction, if I could use such an expression.

E.C.B. I thought it was remarkable that a man, that is Solomon, could contemplate finality in the way that he does here. I suppose it is the same thing that Paul contemplates in Ephesians.

A.J.E.W. I think that is important, because we are very close to it actually. The challenge is - it is a spiritual challenge whether we can touch what belongs to finality and embrace it in affectionate apprehension and be sustained in it in such wise that there is a portion for the heart of God now which in the character and sweetness of it has something of the eternal flavour about it.

A.A.B. Does the Lord's word to the woman, "we worship what we know" (John 4: 22), bear on this? It connects with the reference to "Thou and the ark of thy strength". It is a question of God known in the economy into which He has come, and a suited response.

A.J.E.W. We have had that before us so often, have we not, the truth as to the economy of love? It is often on our lips, but have we penetrated the depths of what it involves? One of the Persons becoming and remaining in manhood, Another of the Persons coming into a place in us and with us, which is essential to the substance of this service being reached and essential to the quality of the vessel that is brought so distinctly and substantially into view in Ephesians 3. This is all dependent on the blessed Spirit. If only we could get a richer sense of the economy of love. I am still

concerned that we do not fall short in those features of the service in which we are thinking of the workings of this blessed economy and reaching out in some sense to the full thought of God Himself, which is really in view in Ephesians 3 "to him be glory". I still feel that there is something to be entered into and embraced in relation to the truth and the glory of God, that the final phase, if I could use that word rightly, of the service, is not in any sense weakened, far less omitted as the service goes on.

A.A.B. In Psalm 29 the presence of the priests and the saints would be involved in every one saying "Glory". It is very brief. I would like some more help as to the remark earlier in the reading as to the distinction and uniqueness of Ephesians 3 by comparison with God coming in and taking possession of a sphere of things here upon earth. Could you say a little more as to that.

A.J.E.W. Well, Mr Burr perhaps can say more.

E.C.B. There seems to be quite a clear distinction between the things that relate to the earth and belong to that in the types (the highest thing the earth touches is that it is all filled with His glory, that is, God comes in and fills it) and what is secured in Christianity which is something going towards God. We have an impression of a sphere which God fills, and many of the hymns connect us with that very effectively; but the end of Ephesians 3 is that there is something going from men to God and that seems to me to be what God ultimately desires. After all, He can fill anything at any time, but to have secured from men something which satisfies Him seems to me to be greater.

A.J.E.W. Quite so. I think that is the point we should get at in this reading together.

C.G.H. I was struck in Chronicles and also in Ephesians, though there be the difference to which Mr Burr has referred, with the great extension in the number of persons in activity in the last two passages. Though, of course, it was in different circumstances and for a different purpose, there was restriction in Leviticus on account of certain things that occurred; but in Chronicles, where God comes

in and fills the house with glory, there are those around and who would be active but were prevented because the glory filled the house. Then in Ephesians we have the assembly active in glory to God, as Mr Burr has pointed out, but then it is the activity of the whole assembly.

A.J.E.W. Yes, indeed, and the assembly is at home in glory. That would be a point to reach. It is her proper sphere; she has her place up there where Christ is, that is her place characteristically. She is a stranger here, this is not her place. The service is intended of God to reflect that. What you say as to all being in it is instructive, because it is noticeable in these chapters how careful Solomon is that all are there, all the people are there and all the priests are there. You might say that the whole situation is ready in view of what is for God. That is something to take account of, having regard all the time to what has been brought out as to the heavenly side of the assembly. We learn from this that we are all ready. Shall we all be ready for the service tomorrow morning if the Lord leaves us here? Shall we be ready, prepared and eager and alert for whatever the Lord in His place as the Minister of the sanctuary may bring in? These are the exercises that are quickened by what we read in respect of Solomon.

T.B. "We all, looking" (2 Cor 3: 18) - do we need to see the glory of the Person of Christ and the Person of the Spirit?

A.J.E.W. That is good to bring in, because we find there what the image is. The change is "according to the same image". We see the precious disclosure in Christ of what the image is to which we are to be conformed, and something is working in the Spirit immediately to bring that about. That is not put off to a future time but is something characteristic of the Spirit's day.

S.D.K.R. Would you say a word as to the bearing of the consciousness of sonship in relation to what you have been saying. Is the consciousness of sonship essential for us if we are to enter into the worship of God?

A.J.E.W. Well, there are many such matters that enter into this. The more we speak of this, the more we realise the wealth of that service and what enters into it. But the consciousness of sonship has a great place, so that it is repeatedly emphasised that David had a son and Solomon was his son. The realisation of sonship, first of all of course, is to be understood by us as it is uniquely in the Person of Christ Himself, the Son; but then the place that the saints come into through a spirit of adoption brings us in to the consciousness of it. We are not brought into it just by the light of it, as Galatians would bring out, but we are brought into it by the Spirit of God's Son. It is a matter which concerns the inwards of the saints themselves under the touch of the Spirit, that we come in that way into the conscious place of sons.

J.C.E. In John 4 the Father seeks worshippers before the Lord says "God is a spirit; and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth" (v 24). I was thinking of what Dr Roberts said; that is essential really.

A.J.E.W. Well, that fills it out.

C.R.B. The assembly is a company of worshippers who are sons, is it not? The liberty of sonship and liberty of men in relation to God enters into it, but this is really a company of persons who as worshippers are just occupied with God in all His greatness.

A.J.E.W. So that you get a certain foreshadowing of this in Solomon's time. The glory coming in would surely involve that, that God is bringing forward His greatness in reference to this whole scene, to bring about the answer which is actually presented. It says that they "bowed themselves... and worshipped and thanked Jehovah". There was something resulting for God, which is to be the outcome in the assembly. But in what a company! a company of sons, as you say.

C.R.B. The foreshadowing is helpful as filling out detail, but the reality of what has been secured as a result of the incarnation is beyond words to compass fully. That men can be free in the

presence of God, to speak to God about Himself, is something to enlarge our spirit of worship, is it not?

A.J.E.W. So in that closing scripture it is so succinctly put, the brevity of it is most affecting, and yet the power of the word! "to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages". What a remarkable conception Paul must have had despite his prison circumstances; and he is setting on by such a scripture as this what the service of the assembly is towards God, having, as you say, God Himself in view and responding unitedly in worship to Himself, the one company of sons.

R.T. Our access in Ephesians is through Him. Would these types deepen our understanding of what that suggest? "Through him" would involve the suffering side as well as the glory. It says "ye are no longer strangers". We are changed to be at home in this scene, where glory is proceeding to God through Him.

A.J.E.W. And save as we are at home shall God receive what is fully to be His portion. How necessary that we are at home there. There is to be no sense of strain or unusualness in our being in the presence of God. The scriptures we have read would help us as to that, that we come in in the full sense of belonging to that presence and are there according to His thoughts in purpose and for His own satisfaction; but responding now, as has been said, in the light of power in the Spirit, to God in the blessedness of all that He is.

R.E.T. Is that why it says "in Christ Jesus"? I was thinking of the skill of Paul in the way that he uses divine titles. He would bring us in Christ Jesus, the anointed Man, into a relationship of love with the Father and into the light of sonship with God.

A.J.E.W. That is it, and bring us into it now.

E.C.B. Is there not a foreshadowing of the assembly in Christ Jesus in Exodus 4: "Israel is my son... Let my son go, that he may serve me" (vv 23,24)? The assembly in Christ Jesus is really a statement of sonship arrived at through union, is it not? And is that what God had originally in mind in Israel?

A.J.E.W. Quite so; but it is never referred to in those terms again. It is a very remarkable fact that God discloses His thought there as to Israel, but it is never referred to in just those terms again; as if God is waiting for what is in the assembly to provide the full answer to the thought of His heart at that moment.

E.C.B. "Israel is my son" is very remarkable, because it refers to the nation collectively. And the assembly in Christ Jesus is really the sons collectively brought into sonship in a single experience, is it not?

A.J.E.W. I think that is very well put. It would help us in the experience of it to ponder that.

LONDON

19 June 1976

THE SERVICE OF GOD (ii)

Luke 10: 21-24; Romans 11: 32-36; 1 Timothy 6: 11-16

A.J.E.W. I thought these passages might serve to draw out into expression, of profit to us all, the spirit of praise resulting from the experience of the brethren, specially as following the Supper. Assembly service itself is a remarkable matter. What we understand as to the normal order of the features of it is not prescribed or laid down in specific ways. It is very much a question of what the Lord Jesus, as the Minister of the holy places, may have set forward and of what is here in the care so to speak of the blessed Spirit. So we need to be peculiarly sensitive to the Lord's part and place, and the Spirit's often vigorous promptings; and as we speak of the service of praise we would need to be sensitive too as to any lines of enrichment that the Spirit would promote. One of the remarkable features of the time of revival has been the way the service of God has. for want of a better expression, taken form, and one of the

most remarkable features of times that were sorrowful is the way the Spirit has seemed to protect what relates to the service of God Himself in distinctive ways, and it seems clear that the Spirit is engaging us in the most distinct sense with the great area of what is going up to God; the assembly being in mind as the vessel of glory in which every manifestation of divine glory would bring something by way of fitting answer in worship and in praise.

The scripture in Luke is remarkable in the way the Lord sets out for us personally, in a very simple and blessed way, the responsive side. It says of Him that He "rejoiced in spirit", showing how His inward parts and faculties, speaking with reverence of Him as a man, were engaged with what was proceeding. Luke, as the priestly writer, is sensitive to these things and, as we would recall, presents Mary to us as rejoicing in spirit "my spirit has rejoiced" (chap 1: 47) showing how the glorious matters in progress are to affect us in depth, the spirit being part of a man, but a vital part, embracing the intelligence; and our intelligence is to be in right exercise as we come into this great area of response.

Then we have read two of the Pauline doxologies. We might have selected others, but the way in which things affect the writer so that he is immediately turned to praise has a lot in it for our instruction. The first that we read, in Romans 11, flows out of the remarkable way in which God in His infinite wisdom has in the course of His ways perfectly reconciled His ways with the assembly and His ways as to Israel. It shows how the consideration of the course that the divine operations have taken is to stir us, and what the outcome of that is to be, the outcome being that we can say something about God and address it to Him. It is not just that the attitude is one of worship, or that the expression "praise" is used, but we can address God and say something to Him which relates to His glory; and that is surely the great point of the responsive side in the assembly. In 1 Timothy 6 the doxology, which is a very powerful one, flows out from the strong injunction of Paul to his beloved child, Timothy, as if he would leave with Timothy and with us, not only the efficacy of the injunction, which is a vital one, but the sense of what

is due to God Himself directly, as His glory is brought in and finds its answer. I have said rather much, but it is a concern to draw out the dear brethren in what their experiences have been in these things in the richness that the Spirit delights to render to it.

E.C.B. Does the epistle to the Hebrews in some way bear on some of the things you said? It sets out the framework of the service of God but it does not prescribe the praise: "in the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praises" (chap 2: 12) and "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually to God" (chap 13: 15); that is all within a framework that is suitable to God. What we might speak of as the framework of the service of God has been recovered for us; within that, the praise itself is not prescribed, but God is the object of it.

A.J.E.W. The epistle to the Hebrews is particularly impressive because it meets what is merely formal and religious according to man and establishes these thoughts in their true setting. Spirituality is needed in reading the epistle, with such subjects as the Melchisedec priesthood which perhaps tax us as to our penetration into the glory of what is truly our portion with Christ. But the way that the Lord singing in the midst of the assembly is brought in early is to leave this impression with us, How is God to be served? We were speaking yesterday of the great fact of what goes up to God from the assembly: "to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus", Eph 3: 21. That seems to fit the epistle to the Hebrews, that the writer is concerned as to what is going up to God, and he introduces very quickly the remarkable thought of Christ in the midst of the assembly.

E.C.B. Do you think that, in the scripture in Luke, when Jesus says "I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth", that in His mind He is linking with eternal thoughts? Much had been expected as to the earth; but that the Father is Lord of the heaven and of the earth, bringing both together in that sense, suggests to me a link with new heavens and new earth, in relation to which the Father will head up everything in Christ (see Eph. 1: 10).

A.J.E.W. It helps to see that. So the way the Lord speaks suggests a certain scope, speaking reverently, to His thoughts about it. It is remarkable how putting it with simplicity and reverence, I trust we can see what the Lord was thinking about, what was before Him. We had a reminder this morning of Isaac's meditating as the bride was brought to him. His meditation would bring out what his thoughts were, and it is very choice that Luke gives us at this point a touch of what the Lord was, so to say, thinking about, and the range that His own thoughts covered, which immediately found expression in praise to the Father, which gives us a lead as to how the praise takes character. It is not, for us, repetition of a religious formula or any such thing, but what is inward and springs from the living touch of the Spirit upon our inward parts.

E.P. Joy and praise are linked in Luke 10. Do you think that the two are linked in the knowledge that every detail in the mind of God is secured according to that mind, and we through grace enter into that. It awakens in our moral being a response that is quite unrestricted by circumstances here.

A.J.E.W. Quite so, and the joy would be deepened in the realisation of total triumph wrought of God in Christ; that is that there is to be no barrier now to His having everything as He in His nature, which is love, would have it. You get an indication of that, in a certain sense, in the typical books, in the minute detail in which certain directions are given there. We do not have such directions as to the service of praise in the assembly, but there were under Moses the most minute directions as to certain details of the service and its conduct, as if we are reminded in that that God has thoughts and feelings about every point of what is going up to Him by way of response. As you remarked, we understand that everything is as God would have it to be, and that occasions the deepest rejoicing, and we have the sense that God has established everything, and for us in the assembly now we understand that He has established everything in Christ, He is going to "head up all things in the Christ", and therefore we can be rejoicing. There is no barrier to the great divine ends being secured. So it is said that "Jesus rejoiced in spirit". It is a remarkable thing

that, in the midst of all that lay upon Him, the Spirit can say that "He rejoiced in spirit".

G.A.P. Does the rejoicing in spirit find an outlet in praise to God?

A.J.E.W. That was really in mind in reading this passage, that it is not just a question of an utterance. The utterance is choice, but more lies behind it, and what lay behind it, even with Jesus Himself (of whom we would speak with tender reverence) was a joy of spirit; the inwards of Jesus were affected and something was to come out of that which would be for the Father's heart.

G.A.P. So that at the end of the gospel they "returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God", Luke 24: 52, 53.

A.J.E.W. Showing the whole atmosphere in which the service should proceed. It is normal that there be joy, that the service be in no way exaggerated, but buoyant; buoyant in its character, and bearing the touch of rejoicing right the way through. That is not said to suggest that it is otherwise, because in general that feature is there, but it is a right feature. The saints are together in joy, not joy based on mere human experience but something which lies in the Spirit.

W.J.W. Would it be a sense of God's supremacy that gives us the basis for this rejoicing?

A.J.E.W. I think it is, and that supremacy comes out in to operative expression. That is, God as supreme has set afoot certain matters that proceed for His pleasure immediately, and that is the assertion of His supremacy. The service of God proceeding under the Lord and in the Spirit, in such a scene as this, is itself a remarkable indication of divine supremacy. God rises above every feature that enters into the creational side and that has come in through sin in man, and establishes a service delightful to His own heart, which is not carried on by creed or direction but by sensitive relation in men to Christ and to the Spirit. That I think is a remarkable thing.

E.C.B. And that is so, whether the surrounding circumstances are as in Matthew 11, evidently of what might appear defeat and rejection, or of success and promotion, as here. Are not the saints to be encouraged like that, that they can be released for the praise of the Father, whatever the surrounding environment?

A.J.E.W. Quite so; that is very practical (to use that word again) because this spirit of praise is to be characteristic in the assembly. The Pauline writings, with the full expression so often of the spirit of praise, would illustrate that to us; and John too, as he begins the prophetic book that he writes, begins with a very sweet doxology. It is to remind us that the assembly is the great vessel of what is responsive going up to God, and that is to emerge into expression at every possible point. Things are to be kept on the buoyant level of praise that relates to God in His supremacy.

E.C.B. Would that be why, in 1 Timothy 6, Paul, before he comes to the doxology, says "Lay hold of eternal life" (v 12)? He was to lay hold on something which is out of the present condition of being and relationship, as Mr Darby said; and it is as lifted out of that that we are released for the service of God.

A.J.E.W. I believe that is a very material point, because what do we know of eternal life? It is good to raise points of this kind. Eternal life is something which the enemy has sought to attack and degrade in the course of the revival, and for which the truth has been stood for, and these things are always of importance as we go on together, that we assure ourselves that we are in the positive gain of what has been stood for in conflict, which God has carried through. Eternal life, with its emphasis on the out-of-the-world condition of things and order of being, as Mr Darby said, is vital in connection with the service of God because it is heavenly in character.

E.O. As to what is going up to God I am wondering whether there would be a link with the reference in the Song of Songs to "pillars of smoke", chap 3: 6. You have referred to the assembly, too, and there is the reference to "she that cometh up from the wilderness".

A.J.E.W. That is suggestive, and it would give us an indication perhaps in the scope of that book of what was spoken of yesterday as to Ephesians 3, that is, sonship reached through union. There may be just a hint of that in the scripture you are quoting ; and what is going up to God is resulting from the choice and holy bond between Christ, the glorious Head, and the assembly.

B.W.W. Does the fact that the Lord turns to the disciples so soon after His own expression to the Father, and the way He speaks to them, indicate that He would have them brought under His own touch, and ourselves in our own time under His touch for what is in His mind in the service?

A.J.E.W. I think that is important, because the Lord gives emphasis here to what they were seeing and hearing. There were no such things otherwise, and they could not know them otherwise. I think the point of that is to be with us, that what belongs in the assembly is of a quality truly remarkable. We are not to allow the great matters of Christ and of the assembly to be in our minds in any sense as commonplace. They belong to the heavenly dignities. They relate to the glory of God, to the glory of Christ and to the glory of the Spirit. I believe we may need sometimes a certain lift in our minds and outlook to have a true estimate of what is proceeding in the assembly as the Spirit operates, to see how really great things are and to seek to penetrate into them, not to be too brief in accepting and dismissing things, but to penetrate into what God is doing. We have a remarkable word sometimes in the prophetic meeting, thank God, and you seek to penetrate into it: What is the Spirit of God doing in this thing? What is issuing for God out of this? What is for His praise arising from this? It is remarkable how things open out.

C.R.B. Would you say something as to what the Lord says: "no one knows who the Son is but the Father".

A.J.E.W. Does it not bring in very helpfully at this point the necessity to keep in our minds that there are inscrutable relations between the Persons of the Godhead? We cannot penetrate into them because they are inscrutable; but to recognise in a holy way

that there is what is inscrutable in relation to the Father and the Son and the Spirit would keep us in the seemly reverential pursuit of what belongs to God's praise.

C.R.B. And does the inscrutability of the Spirit particularly come in in the passage in Romans 11? The reference back to Isaiah 40 would seem to be related to the greatness of the Spirit: "Who hath directed the Spirit of Jehovah, and, as his counsellor, hath taught him?" (v 13). That, as quoted in Romans 11, would seem to guard the inscrutability of the Person of the Spirit.

A.J.E.W. Now, how does that work out with us?

C.R.B. I would like you to open out how these matters enter into our worship of God.

A.J.E.W. Would it mean that there is the deepest concern to maintain our proper depth of relation with the Spirit as we enter into the service? We bear in mind that He has a unique place in it and that we cannot arrive at things by rule or on any basis outside of dependence upon that same blessed Spirit. Does it not emphasise the way in which the service of God is to proceed? It is not according to prescription, although there are elements of framework, but the Spirit must always be in His regulating place in respect of it.

E.C.B. Is it important for us to understand that when knowledge is attributed to us in scripture for instance as to the Spirit, "Ye know him" (John 14: 17) - that does not necessarily mean an exhaustive knowledge of the object of knowledge. There is what is inscrutable.

A.J.E.W. That must always be so, with the Father and the Son and the Spirit. There is what we apprehend, but we can never speak of comprehending, which involves the complete knowledge that you speak of. Are we not kept in what is our proper relation as creatures by realising this? We never cease to be creatures, great as the assembly is. Whilst we have an apprehension of things, we can never expect to reach the complete knowledge that you speak of; and that in itself promotes worship because we realise that with God there is always that which is beyond us, and always that which is

greater than what may enter into our knowledge, and therefore worship is promoted to Him in His greatness.

W.J.R.B. Is that emphasised in Genesis 24, the immense work of the servant there? We were thinking of it this morning in connection with the adorning of the assembly.

A.J.E.W. Yes, and of course what was undertaken was in the type the father's thought. The servant went out under oath, which is very suggestive of the wonderful way the Spirit enters into a certain committed position in reference to what is being secured. We cannot say much about it, because we are touching what is very near to inscrutability, how things were worked out, reverently speaking, between the Persons of the Godhead Themselves. What can we say as to these things? Yet you get a glimpse, and the glimpse is such that your heart is affected and worship is promoted; you say, This is of God. You do not profess to be able to penetrate deep into the thing, but you see something which reflects the divine glory and it is productive of worship in your heart.

E.C.B. Do you think that Romans 11 suggests to us that, while the reference there to the ways of God is to the immense scale on which He has been doing things, God has done things in dispensations that to Him are like the fine dust on the scales (see Isaiah 40: 15) ; but would you think that our current experience of the ways of God is intended to enrich the service of God?

A.J.E.W. Oh, I do. Every line of experience which we rightly pass through is to relate onwards to the service of praise, so that we can say "O depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable his judgments, and untraceable his ways!" That is, there is something we relate directly to God in what is going on. We see that it is no less than God who is acting, and His own attributes and all that relates to Himself are finding expression in what He does; and that becomes, peculiarly in the assembly, the subject of praise. Every glory attaching to God in the course of His operations is surely to find some echo in the praise of His saints in the assembly.

E.C.B. I have wondered whether we neglect that side somewhat by failing to look for what God is doing in the things that we observe; such a detail as someone absent from the Supper because they are very ill: the ways of God are in that. We may look at events as if they were mere events, whereas the ways of God have come into them in order that His service might be enriched through them. We ought always to be able to say "For of him, and through him, and for him are all things".

A.J.E.W. Well, it may be that with spontaneity we might say it more often and God would be glorified in that.

E.P. Do you think that in a past dispensation the experiences that are recounted in the Psalms were productive for the service of God? Even their experience in Babylon, and the release, produced praise to Him and found a part in the service.

A.J.E.W. I think the book of Psalms is to be thought of in greater depth in that connection, because what a remarkable variety of experience is touched in them at different points, both negatively as it seems, and positively too. But all seems to find expression in a psalm and is intended to magnify God, to bring glory to Him, showing the importance of what Mr Burr was saying, that the whole range of experience is to contribute to God's service; the outcome of it is to be there.

E.P. That is a lovely word in verse 33: "O depth of riches". There is something in that that seems to stir something in us, does it not?

A.J.E.W. It is like the responsiveness when the morning stars shouted for joy (see Job 38: 7). Some of us remember a reading in this room with Mr Taylor sen in which he touched that verse as giving us one of the basic elements of the service of praise. So as God brings His own wisdom and power and love into expression there is, so to say, the immediate shout of response from those who are in sympathy affectionately with Him in what He is doing for His own ends.

J.C.E. Do you not think that the "depth of riches" means, for one thing, that it has reached down to us? We might say 'the height of

riches', but the "depth of riches" means that it has reached down to us and more, indeed, than that.

A.J.E.W. The reference to depth would remind us of what is in the heart of God Himself, behind all this, to occasion the full tones, so to speak, the full holy quality of response in the assembly.

F.P.A.S. In one place the psalmist says "Why art thou cast down, my soul... hope in God; for I shall yet praise him " (Ps 42: 5), and that is to the chief Musician. Does that fit in with what you are saying?

A.J.E.W. Well, if we are cast down, who is going to help us up? It is the Lord who does that, the helping up comes from God. We look back on the experience and realise that we were cast down but God helped us up again, and that is productive of what is for His praise.

C.R.B. The full fruit of this would be in the service of God following the Supper, no doubt, but is this intended to enrich the worship of God each day?

A.J.E.W. I am so thankful you strengthen us in that, because that is very much my conviction. The course of things amongst us day by day is to be accompanied by more of a responsive quality, so that what transpires at the Supper, which has a glory distinctively all its own, is to be carried forward more in our minds and spirits into the week and linked with what may come freshly to us in different ways, so that the spirit of praise is maintained; not a question of heaviness, but the spirit of praise.

C.R.B. We do not have to wait to get to the meeting to become a worshipper.

D.A.B. Could you say something as to what prompts this doxology in Romans as to mercy? Paul traces the way that God has brought all, that they are really at His mercy, that He might show them mercy.

A.J.E.W. His mercy is mentioned particularly in the first doxology in 1 Timothy: "For this reason mercy was shewn me, that in me, the first, Jesus Christ might display the whole long-suffering". Then he says "Now to the King of the ages, the incorruptible, invisible, only

God, honour and glory to the ages of ages. Amen", chap 1: 16, 17. That confirms what you are saying. God's mercy, I suppose in a multitude of ways, is the experience of His people.

D.A.B. I wonder whether we read the Scriptures as tracing God's progress to the point where all depends on His mercy, and to see that it is God's desire to express that mercy to all. It shows that everything is from Himself, and that brings out response in this way.

A.J.E.W. Quite so, and this scripture in Romans 11 makes the position clear: "For God hath shut up together all in unbelief, in order that he might shew mercy to all". What wonderful wisdom in the divine ways, to bring out this feature of His glory, that He shows mercy to all!

T.J.B. What does Paul have in mind in Colossians, in referring to "the full knowledge of the mystery of God; in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge", chap. 2: 2,3? I wondered how it fitted with what we were saying earlier as to the necessarily limited capacity of our understandings as creatures.

A.J.E.W. One thing that is evident in such a scripture as that is that without any direct ascription of praise the very phraseology of the scripture itself is expressive of something of the spirit of worship in the heart of the writer, and when the exalted truth that that scripture touches the fringe of it, so to speak, the mystery of God, you can see a kind of spring of praise in the way that the beloved writer presents the matter, as if he is affected himself in his spirit by what he presents. That is to be true of us, we are to be affected in spirit by what we present. If the Spirit gives us a word, and we present it, the intention is that it should affect our spirits and produce something by way of praise.

E.C.B. Would some of the references to full knowledge refer to fulness in us, not necessarily exhaustion of knowledge of the object? Is it fulness on our side?

A.J.E.W. It is fulness on our side and does not imply complete apprehension, as you were saying before. It is as this fulness of knowledge is promoted that praise is stirred in the heart. Some

fresh touch comes, and who of us who is in any sense going on with the Spirit is without fresh touches of glory coming in? It is normal to every day that we get what is fresh in glory and the intention is that that should promote something responsively with us.

E.C.B. There is a somewhat similar thought in regard to being filled with the Spirit, is there not? We can be full, and yet we cannot exhaust what the Spirit is.

A.J.E.W. It is good to bring that out, I believe, because it only emphasises the greatness of what God has called us to.

M.J.W. Mr Darby does speak somewhere, although I am not countering what is being said at all, that we have an infinite Object, that we have an infinite capacity as having the Spirit.

A.J.E.W. Well, that is very rich, and would mean that potentially the blessed Spirit can bring us into anything that relates to the revealed mind of God. Now I thought it would be good to close on 1 Timothy 6 because so much is said in relation to God Himself: "the blessed and only Ruler... the King of those that reign, and Lord of those that exercise lordship; who only has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen, nor is able to see; to whom be honour and eternal might". It is a most stimulating word to us, joined on, as was remarked earlier, to a sober and necessary injunction in view of what is suited to the testimony being maintained by all of us, and the good confession being maintained. But this magnificent touch as to the greatness of God Himself, and the answer "To whom be honour and eternal might. Amen", seems to be a kind of climax to which God would have us find some answer in our experiences.

C.R.B. Involving that we would be helped by experience with God, do you think, to be able to say something fresh to God? I do not mean novel, but something that lays hold of our spirits in a fresh way

A.J.E.W. I feel that the service lacks its depth unless that is so. It is a great thing to be able to say something to God about Himself and something that enters, as you are saying, into our experience. There is the experience immediately of coming into the presence of

God. What an experience that is in itself, to come into the very presence of God, be conscious that there is no distance at all. You are in the intimacy of His blessed presence, and surely that in itself is to call forth something from us that relates to God Himself and His glory. It may be that greater simplicity at times in the expression of it would help us, and allowance of perhaps greater brevity in our thanksgivings.

J.C.E. Mr Coates remarked in connection with Psalm 45 and our tongues being a pen of a ready writer. Did we realise that we may say something that has not been said quite that way since Pentecost.

A.J.E.W. Well, that is the glory of the assembly, the peculiar quality under the eye of God of such a vessel as this, that is able to respond in freshness to what is freshly presented from His side, which I think is the great point in mind this afternoon. As God discloses some feature of glory there is an answer to it that is delightful to Himself.

W.J.W. Would you say also, in regard to the scriptures that you have read today, that they bring both the testimony and the service of praise together?

A.J.E.W. So that what is addressed very definitely by Paul to Timothy relates to what concerns the testimony. I think that is confirming of what you are saying.

LONDON

20 June 1976

Key to initials

(all local except where otherwise shown)

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HOW WE SEE JESUS

A.J.E.Welch

Hebrews 2: 8 (last sentence), 10; John 20: 19,20; 2 Corinthians 3: 18

I seek to say a brief word on how we see Jesus. The thought springs from some conviction that we need more constant engagement of heart and mind with the Person Himself. The concern is, too, that, as we see Him, the experience may be richly productive in us, for the Lord would use every disclosure of Himself to quicken what answers to Himself. It may well be said that the number of times of celebrating the Lord's supper before He comes will not be many, and I feel the need that the remarkable way in which the Lord Jesus discloses Himself among His own might be more richly productive, reaching into affections that become increasingly matured and developed, as every touch of His comes home to us. The Lord is, in this sense, at the close seeking for the best. He has suffered that He might receive it; and, as we see Jesus, every hindrance is to be cast aside that would not only deprive us of the experience but would deprive Him of the fruits of it.

The first passage read is what we might speak of as the dispensational position, that is to say, we are waiting the moment of all things being subjected to Him. Think of the majesty in which He will take His place in relation to all things! How worthy He is of that place! How eagerly our hearts expect it! How blessed it is to show forth His death until He come! He is to be given the place, such that all things are subjected to Him. But that is, as we speak, and as this writer pens his word, not yet: "we see not yet all things subjected to him". Notice the emphatic 'him', as if to bring home to us the glorious reality, thrilling our hearts, as it does, to contemplate it, to see all things set in relation to Christ. There will not be a vestige of anything anywhere that does not in some sense bear witness to the glory of that Person as He takes this place; but it is not yet. "But", he says, "we see Jesus", we see the Person. We wait for all things to be subjected to Him but we do not wait to see Him: "we see Jesus".

Faith apprehends Christ where He is. The blessed Spirit, as ever, discloses glory to us in Christ where He is. In that sense we see Him. We are marked off from what is just in Judaism as such, from those, alas, who reject Him; but it is characteristic of such persons, lovers of Christ, waiting for the moment of disclosure of His supremacy, that they see Jesus. That is the general position; it is to govern us in every relationship, it is to determine the whole course of things in which we engage here. Many other things would obtrude themselves on our view, if possible. How many distractions the enemy would bring in!

How much there is in this dark world to bring in elements of distraction! We say feelingly and affectionately to our beloved younger brethren especially, Come into the gain of this precious point, that we see Jesus. The seeing of Jesus eclipses all else. It is as if the Spirit would at this point in this wonderful book, the book of the opened heavens as has sometimes been said, focus our attention on this one point, that we see Jesus. But that one point is all-important. If we are in the grace which God gives to fill out in uprightness and in fulness the point of testimony to which we have come, that we see Jesus will allow of no other object. We see Him in the sense that He "was made some little inferior to angels on account of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour". God has given Him that place. We are reminded of the place that He has with God and before God, which He possesses, in which He is at the present time, to be seen by us as in it. So that every other authority, every other point which claims any authority or bearing upon us, is rejected inasmuch as we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour. I want to be simple as to this, to attract every heart, every young heart, into what it is to see Jesus. "So that by the grace of God he should taste death for every thing". Notice how attention is called to the suffering of death and the tasting of death. The same glorious Person whose sufferings were the sufferings in which He went into death, the One who tasted death, entering into death as no one else ever entered into death, has come forth glorious beyond death in the power in which He rose from the dead.

What a Person! The scripture here is intended to give such an One, even Jesus, a total grip on our affections, that our attraction to Him and attachment to Him becomes firm and definite, and resistant of every other attachment which the course of things here might propose.

That is the general situation, a wonderful situation. How wonderfully the course of things here among His lovers is provided for, that we may constantly keep in view that glorious Person where He is, faith and the Spirit working that we may be alert as to all that comes into expression and has come into expression in that glorious Person. But then we come to specific experience. The disciples in John 20 had occasion to rejoice, they rejoiced "having seen the Lord". This would relate to a distinct experience as the Lord Jesus Himself, God's beloved Son, comes in among His own and takes His place among them. Beloved brethren, what an experience! Are we dull or slow or reluctant, in any sense, to have our hearts drawn out to this glorious Person at such a moment as this? He is giving His lovers such experiences, peculiarly so at the Supper. Not that the manifestations of Himself are limited to the Supper, but we have learned through constant experience of it in the faithfulness of His love that it is at the Supper that the uniqueness of such a presentation of Jesus is to be known. How urgent that we be ready, that we follow the word which comes constructively in 1 Corinthians 11, "let a man prove himself" and eat and drink, as if there is a course of preceding exercise of heart as to what the saints are to be engaged with soon, if the Lord does not first come; that we may be ready, dear brethren, for Jesus, that we may see Him: "having seen the Lord". We would guard the point, of course, that this took place in the days of His being here after He rose from the dead, that they saw Him corporeally, which we do not as yet; we see Him by the Spirit, but we see Him. I mention these things, familiar in many respects to us, that we may get from the Lord a fresh touch of what this time of the Spirit involves, when the Spirit is free to engage us with this glorious Person in some sense that we see Him. One would seek not to be fanciful as to the idea, but we get a real view of

this glorious Person as He comes in. John refers in his first epistle to seeing Him with the eyes, as if to bring out the substantiality of what was here in: Jesus in manhood; how glorious it was and how the gospel writers present that side to us, the uniqueness of the humanity of Jesus as He was here in manhood, before He died, yes, and in a different sense, after He died and before He went up. How much those men saw that were in His company! And being in His company became the necessary basis of qualification for the apostle who was to be appointed. What a refining experience it would be! What searchings would come as they were in His company and were contemplating constantly what was morally in entire perfection! They saw Him in that sense.

How much is carried forward in that regard in the apostles, the twelve and Paul, of course, the great apostle of the assembly, did not see Him in those conditions and yet he says as to his apostleship, "have I not seen Jesus our Lord", 1 Cor 9: 1. He had seen Him as a Man in glory, he received his commission from the Man in glory, but as to the twelve, it was essential that they should have been in His company and have seen Him. I dwell on that a moment because it brings in in a peculiar way, I believe, the moral side of things, to see Jesus as He was, sinless, perfect, the One who knew no sin; in the very scene in which the power of sin was in constant expression, free of its power entirely, unsoiled, speaking reverently, unstained at every point by the power of sin which has held every one of us in its grip. Think of the perfection of the manhood of Jesus. Have we a view of it? Are we content, in a moral sense, with anything less than what came into expression in the Person of Christ here? Are our standards, in any sense, diminishing as to that? Do we hold in our minds and hearts in holy jealousy the infinite, moral perfectness in which Jesus was and is that governing us? We have not seen it with our eyes in a human sense, we could not see it thus as the apostles did, but we have the benefit of their experiences. The Spirit will bring us into the gain of their experiences, the gain of their instruction, the gain of what the Spirit has brought in in His own way and skill in this remarkable time which is His time, the day of the Spirit, to relate us

back to the perfection of what came into view in the manhood of Jesus. Have we a view of that? Have we an understanding of it?

But then to come back to this scripture in John 20, Jesus came in. It is not that much was said. The first word that came from Him was "peace", a most blessed word. How the Lord would love to extend peace among His beloved people! How the enemy from his side would seek by every means at his hand to rob us of peace! I say that as negative contrast, but it is very, very true. But the Lord came in and said "Peace be to you". Everything from His side is in glorious accomplishment, the whole scene is set for the setting aside of everything that has raised its head against God and the bringing in of a universe where the glory of Christ will be in display and in which God shall find His pleasure; God shall be all in all. The Lord says "Peace be to you". What a word for us, dear brethren! In times that in some respects are full of disturbance as to our surroundings the Lord would have peace amongst His beloved disciples. He does not extend His word, He just says "Peace be to you". Then "having said this, he shewed to them his hands and his side". It is as if He would quicken their powers of perception. He was not extending His word to them, He shewed them something. Dear brethren, are we equal to this, to discerning if the Lord may be pleased to shew us something as He comes in? And what He shews is of Himself. It is not an environment of any kind; what He shews relates to Himself. May our view of Christ be quickened, to be ready for such experiences as these, as the Lord takes His place amongst His own. In our time, as I have sought to guard the point, the experience is distinct in the sense that He does not corporeally come, and yet, what an experience by the Spirit, in the grace that the Spirit loves to give, to discern the coming in of the Lord, as He said Himself in chapter 14 of this same gospel, "I am coming to you" (v 18). We look forward to it if the Lord leaves us a little longer, but the concern is that we apprehend something of the greatness of what is specific as the Lord presents Himself. This is the way in which our view of things spiritually becomes so richly extended as we discern what is presented to our hearts, and our renewed minds, in the Person of

Christ, apprehended by the Spirit, and we may say as we go on through the week, consolidated by the Spirit. The question is whether we are ready for that, whether these experiences are leaving impressions of such depth that the Spirit can expand them and apply them in the course of what we could speak of as our spiritual history through the week as we have our part in the assembly.

Well now, in 2 Corinthians 3 there is a change, the change is on our side, it is through looking on the glory of the Lord. We have often referred to this, I do not dwell at any length upon it, but what a wonderful way the Spirit of God has to bring about formation spiritually in the saints! This section flows out of a chapter in which ministry of a distinctive kind is brought before us new covenant ministry. That is in itself of great benefit to us; new covenant ministry leads us on to something by way of real experience company-wise of Christ. It is the kind of ministry that works on the principle of divine supply, searches out situations (because they must be searched out if God is to have His place) but bringing in what meets situations gloriously, bringing in Christ and the work of Christ, asserting it, however searchingly, in its own positive worth and value. We have had it, dear brethren, in this city, and whilst we say it very humbly, we still know it in this city, new covenant ministry, the kind of ministry that builds up, where necessary searching out what is negative, but building up on the sound basis of what is effected by God in Christ. But it leads up to the glory of what belongs to the present time. The ministry had its place and wrought wonderfully at Corinth, as it has wrought wonderfully in a city like this and in every city where the saints are gathered to the Lord's name; it leads up to the experience of seeing Jesus: "we all, looking on the glory of the Lord". It is a united movement, a united action, so to speak. The glory of the Lord is to be seen and known in some distinctive sense, that is His dominant relations amongst the saints and in every respect. And there is to be a change: "we all, looking on the glory of the Lord, with unveiled face"; not a question of a veil as under the old covenant, but with His face unveiled. Let us think of

what the face of Jesus is and of what is disclosed in that face. Then it continues: "are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit". A change goes on. Where is the change? In the saints. What kind of change is it? Something the Spirit effects, something which is unknown and unseen and never understood by the mere human mind, but which, as we grow in what is spiritual, we begin to see in the saints that we have never seen before. Wonderful experience for us! But it is really for God in what may appear in conformity to Christ as this point of "from glory to glory" is taken on. Dear brethren, these experiences are to be productive, to find an answer in ourselves, to bring out the quality of what God has in the assembly, that the assembly is always to be affected by some fresh presentation of Christ, and always to be affected by the glory of His Person, and always to be ready to come into things on the basis of seeing them presented to our hearts and our renewed minds, helped as we are by the Spirit Himself to discern what the Lord may have in mind at any particular time. May this quicken our expectancy, beloved brethren, on every occasion, that in some sense the glory of the Person of Christ is operative amongst us to bring this great change about not from degradation to glory, as Mr Taylor sen reminded us, but from glory to glory, as if continual increase is in mind in view of the soon-coming moment when we go to be with Him. May God bless the word.

LONDON

19 June 1976

THE CHILDREN'S THIRST

I expect that you have read about Ishmael who, when quite a lad, was in danger of dying of thirst in the desert. He had drunk all the water from his flask. In his distress, however, he must have called out for mercy because God heard his voice in the very place where he lay. This is an encouragement to us to pray at all times. The boy's mother was shown a well of water which met the urgent need with plenty to spare. The well had apparently been just there all the time without their knowing it. This reminds us of another scripture which speaks of drinking with joy from the wells of salvation. It does not say how many such wells there are but in everything salvation is always close to us because "The Lord is near".

Some sailors nearing the coast of Brazil once found that they had no drinking water. They made a signal to another ship asking for some. To their surprise they were told to let down their buckets and they found fresh water! The great river Amazon sends its waters hundreds of miles out into the salt ocean so that the answer to their need was around them all the time. This is like the gospel for "every one whosoever, who shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved".

The water to quench the thirst of the Hebrew children in the wilderness came from a rock which was always ready for them to turn to. This rock was a sign, or type of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ who satisfies the needs and longings of the soul of the believer. God once proved His people by leaving them for a time without water for their thirst. Moses was then told to strike the rock with his rod, when the waters gushed out. This is another type, teaching us that Jesus must be smitten and die so that we could be given the Holy Spirit.

Whosoever will may drink of the water of life freely. Have you asked for and received God's great Gift?

J.C.Evershed